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VIOLETA PARRA: THE GENESIS OF HER ART

Leonidas Morales

1

The creative output of Violeta Parra (Chile, 1917-1967), an integral part of both the legacy and the destiny of folk culture, began during the first half of the fifties, especially following her first trip to Europe in 1954. It then quickly deepened and matured, reaching its conclusion by around 1965. It thus covered a brief period of a little over ten years. A surprisingly short time, considering the assurance and intensity of her artistic expression and the complexity of her work as a whole. It is a universe formed of distinct spheres of creation, in some of which, such as the areas of poetry and song, her output is prolific.¹ This becomes less surprising, upon discovering a telling detail: in Violeta, the creative drive did not progress linearly, through successive transformations of knowledge, as occurred in other cases, where suddenly knowledge met its own limitations and, facing the ghost of rhetoric, opened up to a new scenario.² In this sense, Parra's creative drive lacked "history". The learning process might have taken years, but when Parra began her authentic creation, she already knew what she needed to know and, instead of transforming it, she realised its potential. This knowledge, and the urgent need to artistically communicate it, act as an energetic nucleus from which the different spheres of her creation emanate, in a movement that is similar to the growth and expansion of concentric circles. Instead of linearity, there is superposition. Around 1965 the energetic nucleus

¹ Without taking into consideration the gigantic task of collecting and popularizing Chilean folk music, during the decades of the '50s and '60s.

² This is exactly what happens, for example, in Nicanor Parra's, Violeta's brother, poetry. See my book *La poesía de Nicanor Parra* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello), 1972, 191-220.

seems to be exhausted, and the cycle ends. Could Violeta's suicide at the beginning of 1967 have been a way to render visible this exhaustion and closure?

Violeta's art includes poetry, music, painting, pottery, embroidery (*arpilleras*) and wire sculptures. These are, of course, diverse spheres of creation. The primary material employed in each is different: word, sound, color, wool and metal. And diverse are the figures and images built with those materials. However, the diversity of these spheres of creation is simply a plurality of faces in which the same themes return again and again; Parra's creativity reiterates itself, reproducing the same pattern of correlated elements in each one of the genres in which she works.

The genres, topics and motifs upon which this creation is founded all have the same origin: they all belong to Chilean folklore and campesino culture. The artistic and human knowledge that guides Parra's creative drive is the same in all cases: it is always based on traditional folklore, re-elaborated from within an urban culture, which conditions the perspective of this re-elaboration. The message obtained from this molded knowledge is also the same: a profoundly Latin American knowledge, at once of exaltation and of agony, where song and lament live side by side or entwine their tones. This pattern of elements repeats itself communicating a vision of unity for mankind which is generalized within the artistic universe that Parra creates.

In Chile, in the second half of the nineteenth century, as in any other Latin American country, there was a constant tension between orally-transmitted campesino culture and urban culture generated within the framework of a bourgeois and industrial society. This tension has become increasingly aggravated in the 20th century because they are incompatible: their foundations and life conceptions are antagonistic. During the colonial period, urban and campesino culture were able to live side by side because they could be reduced to common principles, or in any case, non-

contradictory principles. However, in the modern period, the situation is different. By its very nature, urban culture is historically dominant and of bourgeois origin, it can therefore only develop at the expense of traditional folk culture, thus condemning it, sooner or later, to disappear. The only way it allows folk culture space, when not destroying it, is by way of its reduction to an open air museum of antiquities. In spite of the importance that these intercultural relations have for the study of the forms and the message of numerous Latin American 20th century literary and artistic works, they are in general overlooked by researchers, who prefer the status granted to European or North American models.

Most of the work dedicated to Violeta's art, which so far mainly consists of journalistic articles³, has not made the mistake of studying it in isolation from the tradition of folk culture. More than a mistake, such an error would be missing the point. But the authors do make other types of errors. It is frequently placed in a same lineage as tradition, thus implying that it is folklore, which evidently it is not. This mistake is corrected when it is defined as a "recreation" of folklore, exceptional in its beauty and originality. But this advance in viewpoint is finally frustrated, because there is no recognition of the fact that this recreation is conditioned, in its spirit and in its form of execution, by urban culture which, furthermore, is its audience. In my view, Violeta's art can only be understood by studying it in light of the conflict between the two cultural spaces that cross, shape and strain it: folk and urban culture. This, to me, is the fundamental methodological issue. Any study that seeks to be truly productive must begin from this issue.

However, no single approach can be ignored by such a study. It must explore

³ The bibliography about Violeta has been established, in its fundamentals, by Marjorie Agosín, "Bibliografía de Violeta Parra", *Revista Interamericana de Bibliografía*, XXXII, 1982, 179-190, and by Juan A. Eppele, "Discografía, bibliografía y filmografía", in Isabel Parra, *El libro mayor de Violeta Parra*, Madrid, Ediciones Michay, 1985, 209-219.

all the areas where those relations are established, within and outside of the works of art. With only one demand: that they contribute to furthering knowledge. Obviously the discordant relationship between both cultures exists prior to the artistic works in which these relationships are revealed. They constitute an objective fact of the modern and contemporary history of Chilean society. As we approach the mid 20th century they present a specific situation of enormous importance to Violeta's art, as we will see because they preceded the works of creation but were in no way alien to them, or invalid as a way of comprehending these works. Violeta's art would be incomprehensible without them: they shape it. It is precisely here, that the problem I plan to examine is located: that of the genesis of Violeta's art, of what makes it possible. If in fact the relations between folklore and urban culture are determinant, the genesis runs through Violeta's biography and its introduction within the historical phenomenon of the state of these relations in the approach to the middle of the 20th century.

2

Few contemporary Chilean writers and artists have had such extensive and detailed biographical scholarship on them as is the case of Violeta. This is due partly to the interviews she gave. But the majority of the information comes from reconstructions of her life after her death, which are based on testimonies given by relatives, friends, and other intellectuals.⁴ The indisputable seduction that Violeta's life exerts stems perhaps from how extraordinary her life was, and from the belief that

⁴ There are two reconstructions. Chronologically, the first one is by Bernardo Subercaseaux and Jaime Londoño, *Gracias a la vida*, Buenos Aires, Editorial Galerna, 1976 (There is a Chilean reedition: Santiago, Editora Granizo, 1982). The other one is by Isabel Parra, *El libro mayor*, already quoted. Unless a different bibliographical reference is provided, all the information I provide about Violeta's biography comes from those two books.

there is a correlation between this extraordinary life and her extraordinary art. It almost goes without saying: I am not referring to any exemplarity of the catechism type, but to that other exemplarity, rare in its kind, and always admirable, that we associate with those lives absorbedly faithful to themselves, and whose cost, when it is not hostility to the artistic medium, is loneliness. Especially in a society such as the Chilean one, which is rancorous to those aggressively authentic lives that emerge from it occasionally and that frequently end in immolation.

Not all biographies are equally interesting with respect to the study of creation. They are only so when the cultural conflicts and the great ethical principles that preside over creation also govern the life of the creator. Then, as in the case of Violeta, they illuminate each other. The risks of biographical study are known: they consist in giving the biography autonomy or in turning it into a reductive version of events. From a methodological point of view, these risks can be avoided, to a great extent, if one does not insist on following directions that are not suggested by the essence of the *oeuvre* or, likewise, that do not lead us to a deeper understanding of the *oeuvre*. This means, in our case, to project Violeta's *oeuvre* over the biographical space and its historical space, and bring it together with the aptitude to decide about the pertinence or impertinence of what is observed in that area and in that environment. If the creation allows us to see, or even postulate, phenomena and connections essential to the reconstruction of its genesis, then their pertinence is evident.

The problem of the genesis of Violeta's art can begin to be approached through a historical-cultural hypothesis, inscribed within the bourgeois industrial society reproduction movement that began in the second half of the 19th century. A reproduction made at the expense of traditional society, of which the folk culture is an

expression. According to my hypothesis, folk culture experienced a critical state of decline towards the 1940s in Chile⁵ as a result of the vigorous expansion of urban culture, which accelerated the process of erosion and the breakup of folk culture. It spiralled into decline and began a phase of progressive dissolution. Of course, it did not disappear, but its existence became more and more precarious, with a tendency towards the oblivion of its legacy, to dispersion and to only being conserved in small enclaves. It seems to me that a symptom of this situation, that indirectly demonstrates the truth of my hypothesis, is the proliferation, during the following decade, the fifties, of the studies on folklore, and of the investigations, supported by universities, aimed at compiling and disseminating folk poetry and songs. The most important work in this last area, was carried out by Violeta herself.⁶ It has always been this way in the modern history of traditional cultures: its popularization, following or parallel to its systematical study, takes place at the moment where it is on the verge of archaic. The same drive that removes the efficacy of folk culture, is the one that suddenly makes it visible.

How is Violeta's biography related to this context? The first part of her career, up until she was fifteen years old, took place in the province of Ñuble. In a small-town family environment, culturally open to the rural environment, but also aware of

⁵ Numerous elements contribute to this erosive process: the migration of peasants to the cities (urban population outnumbered rural in the '40s); the increase in the presence of schools in the countryside (in 1920 the Law of Mandatory Primary Education was enacted); the influence of radio and its programs, the availability of urban popular music in the home through mechanical reproduction devices ("gramophones"); improved communication with urban centers due to the construction of new roads and the popularization of cars. In the wider context an intense industrialization of the country that enabled rural areas to have access to mass-produced products, with the inevitable abandonment of traditional ones (food, clothing, decoration). For some aspects of this complex process, see Hernán Godoy, *Estructura social de Chile*. Santiago, Editorial Universitaria, 1971, 342 onwards.

⁶ For information on the records Violeta recorded and a description of the folk songs they contain, see Juan A. Epple, in Isabel Parra, *El libro mayor*, 211-212. In 1979 Violeta's posthumous book *Cantos folclóricos chilenos* (Santiago, Editorial Nascimento) was published. It included the lyrics of the songs compiled in the 50's, the presentation of her 'informants' and musical transcriptions by Luis G. Soubllette.

the incitements of urban culture and its popular art. Her father was representative of this receptivity. He was a music teacher in elementary schools, and he sang sentimental country songs and those in fashion in urban centers at family gatherings and parties.⁷ He participated with his children, as a family activity, in theatrical games, comedy, and in the setting up of circus performances for children. Violeta had learned to play the guitar and to sing what she heard. When, in the twenties, economic difficulties affected their household, due to her father's prolonged unemployment, and his subsequent death, she went out with her brothers to sing in the trains and towns of the region. Later they joined second-rate circuses that hawked their flashy spectacles through villages and towns. Violeta sang and danced Spanish tunes to a peasant or semi-rural public.

This taste for Spanish popular urban music and dances would stay with Violeta for many years, but later there was a resurgence of her early cultural upbringing, which was linked to the role of her mother. It rises to the surface of her consciousness. If in the family environment, her father represented a more urban sensibility, her mother, a peasant, was the carrier of folk culture. She updated tradition and retransmitted it daily through language,⁸ educational values, images of life and, in terms of artistic expression, through poetry and music. She also had musical talent, and sang country songs. Relatives or friends of her mother, also peasants, that lived nearby and were frequently visited by Violeta, reinforced this retransmission and extended it to tapestry and pottery.

Violeta absorbed, embraced the traditional culture of her surroundings, that

⁷ Violeta remembers: "My father's repertoire was made up of habaneras, vales, tonadas and small town songs, ballroom songs, romantic, essential features of turn-of-the-century urban songs" (she refers to the end of the 19th century). In Violeta Parra, *Cantos folclóricos chilenos*, 64.

⁸ In *Cantos folclóricos chilenos*, 63-64 Violeta includes Clarisa Sandoval, her mother, as a "source" and upon introducing her remembers her sayings and proverbs in the form of brief formulaic sentences that she would use at home, filled with practical knowledge and traditional peasant humour.

constituted the foundation of her core identity. But it was the urban experience that followed that, slowly and painfully, would awaken her consciousness to this identity, bringing with it unsuspected biographical and creative revelations.

3

In 1935 she moved to Santiago.⁹ The second, urban, stage of her career path thus began. These were the learning years, until the first half of the fifties. Her brother Nicanor Parra, the most important figure in Violeta's future gravitation towards poetry and folklore music, saw to it that she enrolled in school to become an elementary school teacher. Nicanor paid for these studies. After two years, she abandoned school, resolved to dedicate herself to singing and to become financially independent. She formed a duet with her sister Hilda. In bars and neighborhood restaurants they sang what the clientele expected: Mexican songs ("rancheras", "tonadas", "corridos"). During the forties they were highly acclaimed by the public: their opportunities multiply and their music is recorded.

Violeta continued in the urban popular musical genre which, though clearly conventional, was tailored to the popular tastes of a heterogenous public, with very little differentiation. She herself composed and recorded some songs of this type. She also participated, with some success, in Spanish songs and dances, in comedy, variety shows and, once more, in the circus. In a different terrain, her social conscience, always alert to injustices that victimized the poor, gave her the impulse to take part in cultural and political activism linked to the work of the Communist Party in the presidential elections of 1946. At the same time, she wrote a lot. She filled notebooks

⁹ Isobel Parra says this occurred in 1932, *El libro mayor*. It seems to me that 1935 is a more reliable date. This is the date given by Nicanor Parra in my interview with him. See chapter three p.00.

with rhymed poems. Nicanor was her fraternal literary critic.¹⁰ During these years, thanks in part to Nicanor's contacts, she met writers, artists, professionals of culture. Her lively intelligence must have helped to create connections with them that would later aid her own development.

The second stage was fundamental. Tested in the urban public arena, Violeta became aware of her many talents for communication and artistic creation. She perfected them and mastered them. But what we see here is not fragmentation and even less so a simple case of versatility: it is a calling for universality. A multidirectional display of an artistic talent grounded in the urban popular. Moreover, it is the same universality, the same display, though taking very different contents and forms, that would be repeated in the third stage, when the center is displaced towards folklore. Or better: when the popular, understood as a given, external artistic universe that she encounters and in whose discourses she acts as an interpreter and author, is replaced by a different art, born out of folklore as its material. An art that is also popular, but with a different audience: a more educated public with a more complex urban culture. An art that will be entirely her creation, original and not derivative, gifted with a rigour and a power to enable its recipients to feel and see, comparable to those of the great creations of Latin American culture, and impossible to imagine in the stereotyped and flaccid art of the thirties and forties. She would use what she learnt in this period in service of her *oeuvre*.

However Violeta did not approach folklore from the outside. Folklore appeared at the horizon of her consciousness as the result of a knowledge of herself that little by little opened new pathways, letting itself be guessed at. What this knowledge unveiled were her own cultural roots, sunk in the tradition of folk culture.

¹⁰ Subercaseaux et al, *Gracias a la vida*, 43.

Within the scope of this knowledge she sensed a new artistic and biographical project that ended, and excels, the previous popular project. A clear indication that the new project had already begun was the work of compilation and popularization of folk poetry and songs that she undertook in 1953: it signified the opening up to a direct, live relationship with what would be the material of her art and, at the same time, a reencounter, from another perspective and with other connotations, with a biographical memory now objectified.

Violeta never gave up her cultural origins. The same popular art that she turned to in the thirties and forties was not a series of themes, instruments, materials and forms completely alien to traditional culture. Present in it were its contaminations, vicinities, derivations, loans. Yet, how does the turning point from this to folklore take place, from an ultimately marginal knowledge of herself, as a reflex, generated outside of herself and then assimilated; to a knowledge that was instead native to her, that emerged from the depth of her biographical memory installing itself in her consciousness? What brought this memory to life, unleashing a process that led Violeta to the revelation of an art that was possible, that was confused with the destiny of the folk culture and of the man that created it? These are questions that can't be overlooked and they demand a reply.

To answer them, it is necessary to introduce a second hypothesis, in tandem with the first one, that is, to the one that postulates a critical state in folk culture towards the forties. Both contemplate processes, but of a different nature: one that is historical, and another that is biographical. Starting from the assumption that Violeta's biography, considered within the perspective of her art, is the development of an awareness, the second hypothesis postulates this development as a process in three steps. Because of their nature and direction, they are the steps leading the

biographical consciousness to its intervention in the historical process of erosion of folk culture and to its position in the aforementioned decade. According to the second hypothesis, it is precisely through that intervention that the genesis of Violeta's art moves. Its importance is then evident. On the other hand, the available biographical information is consistent with the steps considered by the hypothesis and, in certain concrete points, corroborates them directly or indirectly.

4

Before we describe them, it is necessary to bring to mind some features that are characteristic of folk and urban culture: those that are pertinent to our purpose. In peasant culture, integrated with nature and commanded by a Christian conception of life, man experiences, essentially, a feeling of unity with himself and with the whole. He understands his everyday experience, the small and great events that people it, from an order of transcendent principles and values that provide life and death with meaning, and within which fairness is associated with good, and unfairness with evil. A superior order, that provides a foundation for the feeling of unity and guarantees its return. On the other hand, this feeling of unity is absent in bourgeois urban culture: it is, precisely, its emptiness. Through the infinite and ever renovated web of its everyday transmitters, urban culture reproduces emptiness, disguising it, covering it up, and acts on the traditional cultural nucleus as a dissolvent acid would, disintegrating the feeling of unity.

The movement of the first step was launched in 1935. When Violeta began the phase of urban learning, she was an unconscious bearer of traditional culture and of its inherent attributes. She gradually experimented the rough contact, the corrosive

friction of urban life as an expression of bourgeois culture. The contact and the friction remove superficial layers of conscience, alter and finally break the buried feeling of unity with herself, activating the deep biographical memory, the traces left by the cultural experiences absorbed and embraced within the family environment, that of the years in the Ñuble province. Amidst marriage breakups and the tears of sensibility, the role of urban culture was that of a midwife: through the aggression of the feeling of unity, Violeta became conscious of herself, of the culture that she bore, and that it and the urban culture are two irreconcilable worlds. Instead of turning her identity over to the silent voracity of the aggressor, she reacts, in a challenging gesture, reaffirming it.

The first step begot the possibility of the other two. The two following steps traced an outwards movement of the conscience, towards the historical reality of folklore culture. In effect, the second step ended at the discovery of musical and poetic folklore in the same space where it was created and transmitted properly: the peasant space. In 1952, Nicanor had advised Violeta, inciting her to investigate it.¹¹ However, the incitation, by itself, was not enough to understand the veering. If it worked, I think, it was because the internal process of conscience already pointed to a direction that was propitious to receiving it. It fell on fertile land. And maybe the same Nicanor, that always followed very closely his sister's evolution, also imagined it that way. The conscience of her own identity coming forth in the midst of urban aggression, and Violeta's reaction reaffirming it, predisposed her to be interested in a stimulation such as Nicanor's: Folklore is an objective equivalent of biographical identity. So that, at the end, the discovery of folklore turns out to be a predictable consequence of rediscovering herself.

¹¹ Isabel Parra, *El libro mayor*, 199.

From 1953 onward, as I have already said, Violeta goes through diverse regions of Chilean countryside, “digging up” folklore (according to her own words), poetry and songs, to popularize them such as they are, in their true spirit, which was very different from what urban popular art offered under the label of “Folklore”. While she spoke to the “sources”, mature or old men and women, recorded and wrote what she heard, she probably observed attentively other displays of traditional peasant culture: tapestry, pottery, food, clothing, dwellings. Every which form of folklore knowledge. What she found dazzled her. She said: “How could I imagine that by going out to compile my first song to the Barrancas commune, a day of the year 1953, I would learn that Chile is the best folklore book yet written”.¹²

Let us, for a moment, come into complicity with the metaphor of folklore as a book, and of its reader.¹³ What does Violeta decipher from the signs of that book that suddenly opens up its pages to her? The reading places before her eyes the sober and antique brilliance of an artistic wealth: forms, figures, rhythm, whereupon biographical memory recognizes itself and sensibility has consolation for her wounds. But some shadows rise up and disturb the reading. For instance, the dazzling is not shared by others. When she set out to popularize the compiled songs and poetry, most of the Santiago radios denied her the opportunity to do so: there was no interest.¹⁴ Folklore, Violeta’s one, the authentic, was a has-been that did not fit in with the expectations of urban public, whose tastes are modeled and commercialized by those same radios. Facing the double offense, both to her and to the goods she wishes to communicate, Violeta rebels and responds by insisting, proudly convinced of their

¹² Quoted in Subercaseaux et al, 51.

¹³ The idea of the book as a metaphor or a symbol is common in the language of folklore. This concept extends back to ancient times in European literature, especially medieval literature. See Ernst R. Curtius, *Literatura europea y Edad Media latina*. 2 Vols. México, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1955. Vol. I, 423 onwards.

¹⁴ Subercaseaux et al, 73 onwards.

value.

This was not, however, the only shadow: in the book of folklore she had sensed, as between the lines, a larger shadow, irremediable, funerary. With it, the movement of the third step of conscience was crowned. Some of Violeta's words were a melancholy record of the essential elements of this intuition: "Performing my musical research work in Chile, I have seen that modernism had killed the tradition of popular music. The Indians lose their popular art, also in the countryside. The peasants buy nylon instead of the lace that they used to make at home. Tradition is already almost a corpse. It's sad... But I feel happy to be able to wander amongst my soul, very old, and this life of today".¹⁵ This intuition, that provides a new dimension to the complete process of conscience, and places it on the path of the genesis of Violeta's artistic creation, takes a definite shape during the first half of the decade of the fifties. I suspect that the 1954 trip to Europe and the two years she stayed in France were a final precipitator: it was perfectly possible to imagine that an urban world such as that one, much more complex and subtle, had, precisely because of those features, reactive and powerfully crystallizing, drastic effects for a conscience and sensibility such as Violeta's.

The quoted text is transparent from the viewpoint of the two hypothesis handled to reconstruct the genesis of Violeta's art. It provides a testimony of the insertion of the process of biographical conscience within the historical process of erosion of folklore culture, and its critical state towards the decade of the forties. Without a doubt, the steps of development of conscience finally led Violeta to sense this critical, ruinous state of "modernism", provoked by the expansion of the urban culture. She perceived clearly that folklore culture is at the threshold of its loss,

¹⁵ Quoted in Isabel Parra, *El libro mayor*, 45.

historically condemned: “tradition is almost already a corpse”. The words that best illustrate the insertion are the last ones of the text: “But I feel happy to be able to wander amongst my soul, very old, and this life of today”. They would be enigmatic if they did not mean what I believe they do. Violeta speaks from an absolute identification with traditional culture: if her soul is “old”, it’s because it has the centuries of old age of the soul of that culture. Between her and urban culture (“this life of today”), she “wanders”. She is, thus, a bridge.

The same urban aggression that had broken her feeling of unity, equally broke the continuity of folklore culture. Biography and collective history converged. They merged: Violeta assumed as her own the destiny of folklore culture and, in this intimate solidary link reaffirms, but now at the edge of an abyss, her identity. The affirmation was the adhesion to human and artistic values invested with dignity, with beauty, but offended by urban culture. Unavoidably, the intuition would become universal within her conscience: the aggressor despoils, culturally degrades both peasants and workers (that aren’t but a peasant who has migrated to cities), and that same aggression is fulfilled in Chile, in Latin America, in every corner of the planet.

5

Violeta not only based the totality of her artistic creation within the territory of that intuition, but also did it with a fidelity that was impeccable to its implications. In the first place, and so that folklore culture could turn into material for a creation other than a pastiche, or a form without tension or revealing capacity, it was essential to assume the ominous state it was in. Violeta did not, at any moment, disregard it. Whenever she wrote poetry, composed music, painted, knited or produced small

pottery sculptures, she worked with it, within its atmosphere. She turned it visible. For instance, in that dry, arid, silence, as of absence, that impregnated or framed the images and figures created by her, giving their beauty an aura as if coming from beyond the grave. It was not a case then of prolonging the tradition of folklore culture as if it nothing were capable of altering it, but of recreating it in a dimension of liberty. This recreation, that is necessarily directed to an urban recipient, the only one that has the conditions to penetrate within its meaning, had moreover to be performed with the procedures of urban art. That is why, along with taking possession of folklore's artistic knowledge, Violeta's long learning process included the quest, in the most diverse expressions of urban popular art, of all the orientations that would allow her to recreate the legacy of folklore culture, saving it without betraying its spirit, and in this recreation, saving herself.

Yet in the intuition there were also other types of implications. When we began the examination of the biographical problem, I said that Violeta's life had an evident seduction and I said the reason for this was its exemplarity, understood as an unwavering agreement, between life and creation. The adhesion to folklore culture and to her fate, that was an adhesion to her own identity, did not not only impact artistic creation: Violeta transformed it simultaneously in a non-negotiable, even challenging, commitment of an authentic existence. Some biographical details are illustrative in this regard. She dressed and adorned herself as a peasant. She expelled any trace of bourgeois decoration from the house where she lived, and the house had an earthen floor, as was common in the houses of Chilean peasants. She always maintained an aggressive distrust towards those people in whom she saw, or thought she saw, an artificial interest in folklore.¹⁶ From the moment that intuition crystallized

¹⁶ See Subercaseaux et al, 69-70.

and Violeta bring its consequences to life, the urban world turned more and more into a place of exile for her, such was the transition from bourgeois culture to folklore culture. There is no shortage of testimonies and documents that allow us to see in Violeta the sorrowful feelings, the tremor of tragedy, the wisdom and familiarity of death. The black humor that irrupts surprisingly was employed by her as a spell and, at the same time, as a challenge.¹⁷

Without this intuition that Violeta attained, nothing of what today constitutes, for us, one of the most illuminating artistic creations regarding contemporary Latin America's cultural identity problems would have been possible. We would not have her poetry, music, tapestry, pottery, sculptures. Because the whole of Violeta's artistic universe stems from that intuition. It is the explosive life that opens up her space and the material it feeds from. It contains the supposition of the conflict between cultures, that tenses its forms, of the vision she develops of man and the world, and also of the disturbing restlessness that runs through it. Everything else, that is, the structure of each of the spheres of this universe, the configuration of its themes and style, the technical solutions, the type of implicit recipient, what she communicates and demands from him, and the specific forms of solution of the intercultural relations were Violeta's creative genius. They are also object of a different kind of study, already attempted or pending.

To conclude, I would like to locate the results of this work within the Latin American context. From this viewpoint, immediate verifications arise, of the utmost importance. I will limit myself to pointing them out in a very succinct way. Within this context, the predicament of Violeta's creation does not appear as solitary: it

¹⁷ Patricio Manns, that knew her and participated along with her in musical tours in Chile, recreates in a very vivid way biographical moments where the aspects that have been pointed out are perceptible. See his book *Violeta Parra: la guitarra indócil*. Concepción (Chile), Ediciones Literatura Americana Reunida, 1986.

displays similarities, in fundamental aspects, with that of other Latin American creations. I think, most of all, in the narrative works of Rulfo, in Mexico, and of José María Arguedas, in Perú. The correspondences begin outside of the scope of the works. The three of them were born around the same time: 1911, Arguedas; 1917, Violeta and 1918, Rulfo. The biographical trajectories were also similar: in the first stage, the determinant experiences of identity took place in a rural cultural environment, of small and old towns, followed by, in a second stage, a move into the corrosive experience of the urban world. And lastly, for the three of them, the decade of the forties was one of learning and development, and the fifties and sixties was the period where their definitive work came to light.

The relations of conflict between traditional and urban culture, that make Violeta's creation intelligible, are also those that make Rulfo's and Argueda's creation comprehensible. It's true that in Arguedas it's more a matter of relations between urban and native cultures. But this circumstance does not at all modify the essence of the problem. Of course, the forms adopted by those relations are different in the three cases. However, all of them have in common the use of traditional, peasant or native culture, as a material for a recreation with their own procedures of urban art or literature, achieving a merge and a new product. And what is decisive is that in the three works the recreation was performed starting from the conscience of the dissolution and loss of traditional culture. The shadows that blurred their atmosphere came afterwards. The conclusion is obvious: the process of erosion of Chilean folklore culture, that leads it to a critical state towards the decade of the forties, is a phenomenon of Latin American expanse, with coincidental chronological frames. Thus, the explanation of the genesis of Violeta's art starting from the insertion of the biographical process within the historical process could also be

methodologically valid to explain the genesis of Rulfo's and Arguedas's work.

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